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ABSTRACT

A major task involved in teaching pupils is to group them wisely for instruction. Most elementary schools group learners in terms of a self-contained classroom. While it may seem extreme, all curriculum areas on each grade in the elementary school may be departmentalized. In some ways, departmentalization harmonizes more with a separate subjects curriculum as compared to the self-contained classroom approach in grouping pupils for instruction. The controversy continues over homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping of pupils for instruction in the language arts--each system has advantages. An open-ended approach to grouping pupils is to use learning centers. A dual progress plan in grouping pupils for instruction is generally implemented on the intermediate-grade level. The team teaching approach emphasizes that two or more teachers plan together the objectives, learning activities to achieve these ends, and the evaluation procedures to ascertain how much pupils have learned. Some educators advocate having pupils of different age levels taught in a single classroom. Mainstreaming of pupils has made for an increased amount of heterogeneous grouping of pupils in the United States. Teachers, administrators, and parents need to have an open mind in terms of how learners should be grouped so that each pupil can attain as much as possible in the school curriculum. (RS)

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GROUPING PUPILS FOR LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

A major task involved in teaching pupils is to group wisely for instruction. Means of grouping pupils should reveal respect and acceptance of each learner. Learners need to be placed within a group in which optimal achievement is possible. Flexible grouping should be in the offing whereby pupils can get to know and appreciate learners from diverse backgrounds. Rigid, formal approaches which are outdated in grouping pupils for instruction should be avoided. Teachers and principal need to study and apprise diverse means of grouping pupils for learning. Ultimately, the best grouping procedures should be used in which pupils achieve a swell as possible in knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The Self Contained Language Arts Classroom

Most elementary schools group learners in terms of being in a self contained classroom. Thus the teacher teaches a single set of pupils in a classroom for most of the school day, except for music, art, and physical education. The teacher has numerous opportunities to get to know pupils well in a self- contained classroom. Thus the teacher should be able to provide for diversities among learners so that each may achieve as much as possible. Teachers here should also be able to provide for different learning styles of pupils. I believe that teachers in the self- contained classroom can plan objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures well due to observing the same set of pupils frequently in the classroom setting. There are ample opportunities then to understand each pupil so that he/she might learn as much as possible. Pupils, too, can get to develop selected expectancies of teachers due to seeing them teach each sequential day of teaching. I feel that pupils develop feelings of security when they know what to expect of teachers. Should there be a conflict which hinders a pupil to benefit from a teacher's instruction, he/she could be transferred to another classroom and teacher. Further advantages of the self-

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contained classroom include the following:

1. the language arts teacher can relate subject matter from different curriculum areas effectively.

2. the teacher may use knowledge acquired from each pupil to more adequately provide for individual differences in language arts among learners.

3. the teacher might communicate with parents more effectively by knowing more about each parent and child due to the self- contained classroom.

Departmentalization and the Pupil

One may departmentalize all curriculum areas on each grade in the elementary school. This would seem rather extreme, especially on the primary grade levels where the self- contained classroom holds sway. For selected educators, to departmentalize completely on the intermediate grade levels would be equally severe. However, Intermediate grade children are older as compared to primary grade pupils and can adjust more so to complete or modified departmentalization. Generally, modified departmentalization is emphasized on the intermediate grade levels. Thus a teacher may teach language arts only, in departmentalization. Or, reading might be taught by a single teacher to several classes of pupils. With departmentalization, the teacher may specialize in teaching one academic area only. Here, the teacher might truly develop proficiency in knowledge and skills of teaching one curriculum area only. I have observed numerous teachers teach two curriculum areas only, such as language arts and science which is then a modified approach in a departmentalized elementary school. These teachers appear to feel more proficient in teaching when they can concentrate on teaching two curriculum areas only, as compared to the entire gamut of courses that a self contained classroom my emphasize.

There are disadvantages in a departmentalized plan of instruction in that a teacher may not be able to assist pupils to perceive relationship of subject matter taught as compared to the self contained classroom.

However, I have talked to departmentalized teachers who plan together with teachers of other academic areas in relating content. These teachers appear to feel that departmentalization in grouping of pupils does not necessarily make for a separate subjects curriculum. Thus a language arts teacher here can work with other teachers to emphasize relationship of subject matter taught. These teachers do feel that a little inconvenience is involved in planning with other teachers, but the consensus is that classroom teachers should always have opportunities to work together in planning the objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures.

In some ways, I believe that departmentalization harmonizes more with a separate subjects curriculum as compared to the self contained classroom approach in grouping pupils for instruction. If teachers and administrators do want more of integration of content in the curriculum, teachers in a departmentalized plan of instruction must work cooperatively with others to make this come about. Perhaps a modified plan can help such as one teacher teaching both language arts and science and a second teacher teaching both mathematics and the social studies to different classes of intermediate grade pupils. The modified plan would assist pupils to become oriented to a strict departmentalized procedure when entering the senior high school years. The sequence could be quite abrupt when a pupil has experienced a self contained classroom only and then the next school year experiences a strict departmentalized plan of grouping for instruction. A more gradual sequence would be recommendable.

Homogeneous versus Heterogeneous Grouping Controversy

There is continuous controversy over homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping of pupils for instruction in the language arts. Homogeneous grouping emphasizes a uniform group of achievers being taught in a single classroom. Here, the principal and teachers determine how best to arrange pupils in a given grade so that similar attainment levels of pupils are taught in one room. A wide range of achievement is not wanted in homogeneous grouping. The belief

emphasized in homogeneous grouping is that pupils of similar achievement can best learn from each other. Learners might then challenge each other more so if the attainment levels are equivalent in a classroom.

With heterogeneous grouping, learners are of mixed achievement levels in a classroom. The fast, average, and slow are placed in the same room. There are numerous reasons for doing so according to its advocates. Democracy is more in evidence here as compared to homogeneous grouping. Learners also need to work together with each other regardless of ability levels. I believe there should be both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. When grouping learners for reading instruction, I definitely believe that pupils should be grouped homogeneously. Why? For example, when teaching directed reading and pupils are reading orally to reveal word identification strengths and weaknesses, pupils should be somewhat uniform in reading attainment. If not, the fast learners will become restless in listening to slow learners read and slow learners might become embarrassed when fast readers listen to the many problems revealed in oral reading. The problems become even more pronounced in silent reading when the teacher in a mixed achievement level group has pupils read for a definite purpose. The fast readers finish quickly whereas the slow readers take much more time to complete the same reading activity. The teacher here may become ill at ease if the fast readers need to wait for what seems like a long time to have the slow learners complete the same reading selection.

At other times, I would recommend heterogeneous grouping such as when pupils view an audio- visual activity in an ongoing unit of study. After the presentation, all pupils in a mixed achievement level classroom can benefit from discussing its contents. I believe that one should not become dogmatic on emphasizing one approach only, such as selected educators are doing today in favoring heterogeneous grouping only. These educators quote that research states pupils achieve at a higher rate in heterogeneous grouping as compared to homogeneous grouping. Generally , slow learners learn better in heterogeneous grouping settings. Frequently, advocates of heterogeneous grouping look only at

slow learners and their higher achievement in heterogeneous grouping. They have one role for the fast learner only and that is to assist the slow learner. There are times when this should be a goal. However, the fast learner needs to have a challenging curriculum of his/her own with proper scope and sequence. As an elementary pupil, I was asked day after day to pronounce words to pupils in silent reading who raised their hands for assistance. At that time, I also wanted time to achieve personal goals in school. There certainly were times when I liked helping others who had difficulties in reading. I believe the dilemma can be resolved between heterogeneous versus homogeneous grouping with looking at what assists a child to achieve optimally. Which plan of grouping pupils for instruction then assists each to learn as much as possible on an individual basis?

The heterogeneous versus homogeneous controversy then might be summarized in terms of advantages for each plan of grouping pupils for instruction. Thus the former emphasizes

1. mixed achievement levels of pupils in one classroom.
2. pupils of diverse abilities learning from each other.
3. learners working more like the social environment emphasizes in that people of different attainment levels interact with each other.
4. usually, cooperative learning goes along with heterogeneous grouping advocates in that pupils of diverse ability levels work together on a project.
5. the composition of heterogeneous groups should change, making for flexibility.

Homogeneous grouping advocates believe the following:

1. pupils who possess more of homogeneous characteristics can do a better job of challenging each other.
2. the teacher can do a better job of providing for individual differences in a homogeneous grouping setting.
3. each pupil can do more of his/her fair share of the work when committee endeavors are emphasized.
4. less looking down upon slow learners should be in evidence

when pupils are quite similar in achievement within a classroom.

5. there can be numerous opportunities to stress heterogeneous grouping when pupils are in physical education, art, and music classes.

Learning Centers

An open ended approach to grouping pupils for instruction is to use learning centers. The teacher can develop each center and tasks therefore or teacher- pupil planning might be emphasized to develop the language arts tasks for each center. The latter approach may take considerable time to implement but is well worth the time to do so. Being able to plan is so vital for each pupil to do and do well. There needs to be ample input from learners when teacher- pupil is used to develop the curriculum. The former approach in which the teacher develops all the tasks for the diverse centers can be quite open ended if there are more tasks available for learners to select sequentially than what can be completed. Thus learners individually may work on sequential tasks of their very own choosing and omit those not possessing perceived purpose. If tasks do not meet personal needs of individual pupils, the latter can talk to the teacher and negotiate more worthwhile language arts activities from the pupils' point of view.

Humanism is inherent as a psychology when learners individually select their own preferred tasks to complete. Humanists are strong believers in guiding the pupil to make choices and decisions in the curriculum. Sequence here resides within the pupil and not within textbooks nor the teacher. The pupil is the focal point of instruction. Thus the pupil needs to be heavily involved in choosing the objectives of instruction, learning opportunities to attain the objectives also must be pupil centered, and evaluation procedures whereby the learner appraised the self needs to be in evidence. A humane curriculum should thus be an end result.

Pupils may select tasks that harmonize with their very own individual levels of attainment. They may choose activities that are worked on individually or activities may be chosen which emphasize

committee endeavors. The choice is for the pupil to make. The problems of homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping have been greatly minimized when using a learning centers philosophy in teaching learners. When pupils choose sequential tasks, they may work on an activity individually. Thus it does not matter if the learners are somewhat uniform in achievement or mixed achievement levels are in evidence in the classroom. When a pupil chooses committee work as a task, then homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping may be in evidence. Perhaps, the teacher can guide pupils here to work with learners from both categories. The teacher encourages, stimulates, and motivates learners to achieve optimally in a learning centers approach in teaching pupils.

The Dual Progress Plan

The dual progress plan in grouping pupils for instruction is generally implemented on the intermediate grade level. The curriculum areas of mathematics and science are taught as being ungraded. there are no grade levels here. Pupils individually, however, achieve as much as possible. There are separate teachers for mathematics and for science, resulting in departmentalization. Those who wish to teach a separate academic discipline in the elementary school in mathematics and in science may do so. Teachers might also teach English and the social studies as an integrated classroom. There are homeroom responsibilities here for the teacher in teaching English and social studies. Guidance and counseling of pupils may be stressed during homeroom time.

Teachers who teach both social studies and English emphasize the graded concept here. Thus there are definite grade level standards for pupils to attain in social studies and English. The social studies - English teacher is in a modified self- contained classroom with two curriculum areas only, that need to be taught by one person. Team teaching could be emphasized here in the dual progress plan. It could also be stressed in homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping.

Team Teaching and Grouping Pupils for Instruction

The team approach in teaching learners emphasizes that two or more teachers plan together the objectives, learning activities to achieve these ends, and the evaluation procedures to ascertain how much pupils have learned. Notice the teachers must plan instructional strategy cooperatively, not individually. With cooperative planning, participants may think critically about ideas presented from team members. The best possible procedure presented should be used in teaching pupils. More than one mind is better than a single mind in preparing for teaching.

There are three levels of teaching using a team approach. Large group instruction is one level. After planning for teaching, one team member may teach pupils in large group instruction. How many pupils are there in large group instruction? If two elementary school classrooms are joined together, there might be fifty pupils from the two rooms. If three classrooms are joined together for large group instruction, there might be seventy- five learners from the three rooms. Could a team approach be used in large group instruction? The answer is in the affirmative. What is salient in large group instruction is that the teacher/ teachers can do a good job of motivating pupils. Thus audio-visual aids that engage pupils in learning should be used in large group instruction. Teachers not involved in direct teaching in large group instruction may assist in monitoring learner progress.

The second level of team teaching is to assist pupils in small group endeavors. Within the small group, teachers guide pupils to clarify and discuss what was presented in large group instruction. Teachers here should use a variety of materials such as audio- visual and printed content such as in textbooks and tradebooks to assist each pupil to attain as optimally as possible. In small group endeavors, pupils will ask questions and identify problem areas. The teacher needs to guide pupils to locate relevant information.

A third level of team teaching is to emphasize individual study. Each pupil will have a topic too pursue or an area of interest to develop within the framework of individualized study. The leaner identifies a

problem or wishes to pursue a task of personal interest. These kinds of learning activities can be planned by the pupil and teacher. There must be a purpose in doing the project. Planning needs to accrue to achieve th purpose or goal. Next, the pupil needs to follow through with the work involved to attain the purpose. Ultimately, criteria should be developed to appraise the completed project. There should be heavy involvement by the pupil in working on the project method. Individual study goals must grow out of the large group session as well as from the small group work stressed. There is a definite relationship among large and small group instruction as well as of the individual endeavors emphasized in the language arts.

There can be an interdisciplinary team as well as team members emphasizing a separate academic area domain. The former would be more typical of elementary school teachers in which the concept of the self contained classroom has been stressed in teacher education training at a college or university. Thus most elementary school teachers have not majored in a single academic area such as English, but they have experienced a general education curriculum plus professional course work and student teaching in becoming a licensed teacher. If an elementary teacher was educated at a college/university school of education with a double major such as English and elementary education, then a team of teachers with similar training may teach English only, in a departmentalized classroom. An interdisciplinary team also could comprise of team members having majors in history/elementary education; English/elementary education; and biology/elementary education. These teachers would then plan the objectives, learning activities, and evaluation procedures for teaching a given set of learns in large and small groups as well as in individual work. Relationship of diverse academic disciplines might the be in evidence.

In team teaching, a leader of the team may be appointed and receive additional salary for being the designated leader. Team teaching has also be emphasized in which there is no designated leader, but leadership emerges within each planning session.

To implement team teaching participants should have a voice in which team they wish to participate in. No teacher should be forced to serve on a a team. Perhaps, with stimulating workshops on team teaching, teachers may feel motivated in desiring to be a member. Thus teachers must be knowledgeable, skillful, and possess appropriate attitudes prior to being members of a teaching team. I have known teachers who feared being a member of a teaching team and yet with inservice education felt motivated in becoming a team member.

Interage Grouping

There are advocates of having pupils of different age levels being taught in a single classroom. For example, pupils in grades one and two could be taught in a single classroom. This could be a team teaching situation or it might emphasize a single teacher teaching a given set of pupils in interage grouping. The children taught here in one classroom could be quite heterogeneous in the language arts. It could be also that learners in the two grades were grouped homogeneously by placing a somewhat uniform level of attainment of first and second graders combined in a single classroom. What is the focal point of placing pupils into interage groups? People interact with each other in society who are of different age levels. Second, it means little when speaking of a pupil being in grade one or two. Thus selected first grades read better than some second grade pupils. Third, learners need to get along well with others regardless of age levels. Social development is very important. Fourth, dividing pupils in classrooms by age levels is not too relevant. Pupils mature at different levels even though they are of the same age or similar age levels. When serving as an upper grade rural school teacher for two years, I combined fifth and sixth as well as seventh and eight grade English, social studies, science, and mathematics. In many ways, this was done out of necessity to avoid teaching too many subject matter areas at each grade level. I have friends who taught all eight grade levels in the elementary school, again necessitating the combining of grade levels for instructional purposes. Was this good to do? It was basically done out of necessity. My answer would be that it

again confirms that grade levels may mean very little when thinking of learner achievement since I did have younger learners who attained at a higher level as compared to older pupils. Interage grouping of pupils for teaching has a different motive today as compared to when small rural one or two teacher schools were in evidence. Today, the emphasis is upon interage grouping to assist learners to work effectively with others so that social development may be more optimal.. Hopefully, academic achievement will also be at as high a level as possible for all pupils.

The Joplin plan for teaching reading emphasizes interage grouping. Here, pupils from grades four through six are regrouped en toto. Thus, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils may be together in a separate room to make for homogeneous grouping in reading instruction. The top fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils then emerge in interage grouping in a single room. There are also fast, average, and slow readers grouped homogeneously from the different intermediate grade levels to provide homogeneity within specific classrooms. Joplin plan advocates have made salient research claims from their research results on interage grouping in reading.

Mainstreaming of Pupils

Mainstreaming of pupils has made for an increased amount of heterogeneous grouping of pupils in the United States. Handicapped pupils are then to be educated in the least restricted environment and receive an appropriate education, according to the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Before that time most children were continually taught within the framework of the handicap possessed in separate classrooms from that of normal pupils. Thus an orthopedically handicapped child was in a special room from that of learners in a regular classroom. Selected aggressive educators felt that pupils were being segregated based on the handicap possessed. Thus mainstreaming came into being whereby a handicapped learner was to be placed in the least restricted environment. This has usually meant the regular classroom.

Each child who is handicapped is to have a planned individual

educational plan (IEP) to follow as far as the curriculum is concerned. An IEP consists of behaviorally stated objectives agreed upon by the involved parents, the teacher(s), the principal, as well as specialists in the field such as speech, > physical therapists, hearing and sight resource personnel, as well as counseling services. No child is to be refused an appropriate education. If a child has not been placed appropriately, the parents can ask for a reevaluation. Parents may also sue the school if misplacement or diagnosis has been in error. If the judge or court rules in favor of the parents of the handicapped pupil, the school must incur all costs of the lawsuit. Judges tend to be generous in ruling in favor of the parents of the handicapped. With mainstreaming as a federal law, classrooms have become increasingly heterogeneous in grouping. Questions that can be raised of mainstreaming are the following;

1. Do these pupils achieve more in a regular classroom as compared to where the numbers are smaller such as being taught by an appropriate teacher of the handicapped?
2. Are regular teachers trained and educated properly to teach the handicapped in the classroom?
3. Would handicapped pupils attain more in a special class in which the pupil- teacher ratio is very low and where the teacher is properly trained and educated?
4. Do regular teachers receive aid service to assist with teaching the handicapped in the classroom?
5. How do normal children achieve in a mainstreamed classroom in which a handicapped pupil demands or needs much assistance?

In Closing

Teachers and principals have a salient responsibility in determining the best approach in grouping pupils for instruction whereby each learner achieves optimally. There are numerous procedures in grouping pupils of instruction which are recommended.
Each has its pros and cons. Educators and parents need to study and analyze each method of grouping pupils for instruction. A well informed

constituency in terms of how learners may be placed into groups for teaching and learning is necessary. A plan must be implemented which provides for each pupil to learn as much as possible. The plan or plans of grouping chosen need to be based on a sound philosophy of education as well as a recommended foundation of the psychology of instruction. Rigid approaches must be avoided since flexibility is a key term when thinking of how learners should be grouped for instruction. Thus teachers and the principal need to have an open mind in terms of how learners should be grouped so that each pupil can attain as much as possible in the school curriculum.

I make the following recommendations when emphasizing how learners should be grouped in the school language arts curriculum:

1. the plan of grouping stressed must benefit the individual child in ongoing lessons and units of instruction.

2. an integrated curriculum whereby each subject matter area is related within the total curriculum should be implemented in grouping for instruction. The child should be perceive knowledge and skills as being related.

3. parents need to be involved and informed about proposals for grouping learners for teaching and learning.

4. inservice education for teachers may well be necessary when implementing a new plan in grouping pupils for instruction.

5. the school curriculum and the approach to grouping learners for instruction need to be congruent and not separate in philosophical and psychological beliefs.